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General Election 2017 Port Of Olympia Candidate Questionnaire: A Voter Resource

Interfaith Works sent out a questionnaire to candidates running in contested primary races for Council seats in the Cities of Lacey, Olympia and Tumwater. The questions reflect issues of current concern to Interfaith Works.

We believe that the candidate's responses are of great interest to our membership and our many community partners. Our objective is to provide a resource to voters to guide them in their election choices.

Candidate responses are published without editing. Interfaith Works does not endorse any candidate.

Port of Olympia Port Commissioner, District No. 3 Nonpartisan Office – Four Year Term Candidates: Gigi McClure / Elizabeth (E.J.) Zita

1. The Port of Seattle recently agreed to allow a space for houseless people to be located on its property. Up to 80 residents would live there in tents and small structures. What is the Port of Olympia's role in a countywide solution to homelessness? If you are elected Port Commissioner, would you vote to allow a tent city on Port property? Why or why not?

Gigi McClure:

The Port of Olympia is a medium port and Seattle is a Large port with extensive resources. The Port Commissioners role is to ensure the successful operations of the port and always act in the best interest of the port. If elected Port Commissioner, I would not vote to allow a tent city on port property.

The port primary mission is to create economic development, and to create business opportunities within the county. There are several factors that must be considered: liability, clean-up, and utilities cost for a port operated tent city. Port properties were acquired to create revenue. There are over 17 organizations providing support to the county to battle homelessness. Leasing opportunities are available to those organizations to support the needs of homeless. The Port of Olympia would be required

to request additional funding at the tax payer expense to meet this requirement. The port is currently levying taxes to pay off operational debt and environmental clean-up.

Elizabeth (E.J.) Zita:

Yes, with community approval. The Port of Olympia's central goal is Resiliency for the Future, benefiting our Economy, Environment, and Community. With over 1000 acres of real estate, much of it underdeveloped, the port has room for emergency housing. Residents would need services, which should create jobs. City permits would be required. Many good local agencies, offices, and individuals help with homelessness, and they should be consulted to make this work well. Neighbors should have information and significant input. We are a compassionate community with enough resources, and we can do this together.

2. One of the Port's stated goals is to increase international trade. What should the Port do to ensure that any increased rail traffic that results from this will not harm the environment should, for example, a derailment occur? Related to that, what should the Port be doing to reduce carbon emissions related to its work and that of its tenants and other users?

Gigi McClure:

There is no correct answer to the first question. I can state that the port does not control or operate the rail system. The port is establishing best practices for environmental strategies through its development of policies, awareness, and clean-up. The Port of Olympia was awarded the 2017 Government Thurston Green Business of the Year Award which was presented by Congressman Denny Heck.

Elizabeth (E.J.) Zita:

Rail is efficient transportation, and we need more passenger rail. But dangerous cargos should not travel by rail. The oil spill near Mosier in 2016 shows that even with good tracks and trains, recently inspected and operated by skilled professionals, accidents can happen. The only way to ensure that increased rail traffic does not harm the environment is to not ship harmful cargos. The Port of Olympia already has a resolution against oil trains (2014-07).

Activities and cargo that increase carbon emissions should be minimized - e.g. from transportation, energy, and buildings. The Port can reduce **transportation** emissions by reducing the number of polluting vehicles and increasing reliance on electric vehicles (maybe even an electric passenger ferry to Tacoma and Seattle). We should cooperate with local planners to incentivize mass transit, e.g. with dense urban development. The proposed Agriculture Business Hub in south Thurston County could centralize distribution of local farm products, reducing overall emissions.

Buildings – the port should continue improving building efficiencies, and rewarding developers that build green.

Energy – the port should seek grants for more solar power on our real estate and explore solar thermal heating. We should stop shipping fossil fuel related cargo, because it accelerates carbon pollution and sea level rise.

3. Another of the Port's stated goals is to increase economic opportunities. What specifically should the Port do to reach out to local entrepreneurs to encourage and support small businesses?

Gigi McClure:

The port should reach out to the Economic Development Council (EDC) who work with entrepreneurs to develop small business grants. Also work with city council members within each city to encourage some form of start-up break that incentivizes new business opportunities.

Elizabeth (E.J.) Zita:

Small business - Fellow commissioners agreed with my proposals for [Business Diversification](#) & [Incubator Hubs](#) at the port. Incubator hubs can help entrepreneurs launch or expand their businesses. Public and venture capital can help fund startups, and mentors can help entrepreneurs develop skills they need to succeed.

Jobs - For example, the Port of Olympia could manage incubators at the new Tumwater Brewing and Distilling center, as the Port of Walla Walla does for their winery center. The proposed Agriculture Business Hub can help not only our community and economics, but also help the environment. Improving regional markets for local goods can yield transportation efficiencies, with less carbon emission.

Agriculture - Port could install a refrigerated container for the Olympia Farmer's Market, and could provide a better location for the Tumwater Farmer's Market. Some land near the airport could be grazed by small livestock, for a veteran's farm. By making local agriculture more economically viable, the port can also help preserve working lands and open space.

Transportation - A passenger ferry from Olympia to Tacoma and Seattle would stimulate downtown business, ease I-5 gridlock, and provide emergency management options.

Recreation and tourism - we have a lot of potential on port properties. Our Executive Director got a contract for small cruise ships to Olympia, starting in 2018.

4. Please state your top priorities for the Port of Olympia in 2018 and why they are priorities. Sea Level Rise (SLR) and its impacts on all of the Downtown areas. The City, Port and LOTT who all have big investments in the downtown area have all contributed to the current study and plan that will be coming forward in a report to all three entities in November of this year.

Gigi McClure:

My top priorities for are as follows:

1. Assess the current process for failing properties to determine why, and work with the executive director to correct shortfalls. Why – The port should and can be self-sustaining, as a process manager, I want to look at the details of each operation with new eyes.

2. Exercise my experience as a proven organizational leader to build a cohesive and effective operation along with the other two Port Commissioners. Why – there are readily achievable opportunities available at the port once the delaying tactics are removed and focus can once again be placed on port operations.
3. Get diversify cargo. Why – the markets shift with supply and demand. The port should have a variety of cargo, rather than rely solely on four specific cargos for operation.

Elizabeth (E.J.) Zita:

Financial sustainability – Port commissioners owe fiducial responsibility to Thurston County taxpayers. Wise management of public resources should yield a better return on investment, not subsidies for special interests. Then we can do more economic development and job creation.

Openness and transparency – Governments should cooperate with the public, share information readily, and listen to people’s ideas and concerns. The public deserves it, and the port can benefit from it. Tumwater University is a good model for the port to follow.

Environment – The port is cooperating with Olympia on sea level rise planning, and should cooperate with Cities, Tribes, and agencies to restore shorelines and water quality. We should ship only safe cargoes. The port should help our region transition to renewables, with jobs for the future.

5. On several occasions in the last few years there have been loud and passionate protests, bordering on violence, when the Port chose to accept military shipments. What is your position on whether the Port should stop handling military cargo?

Gigi McClure:

My view on the acceptance of military shipments is in line with the directive that the Port of Olympia as a secondary port to the Port of Tacoma. Therefore, if the Military wishes to ship military cargo (the Port of Olympia does not have the level of security for weapons or ammunition) then I will cast my vote as one of three port commissioners to move the cargo. Why - Not all military cargo is shipped to a combat zone. The military also provides humanitarian relief as well as conduct training with other countries building friendships and alliances. Having been on the receiving end of cargo that has arrived damaged or late and each time it creates a problem delaying movements to training. The bottom line is – Military training, deployment, and humanitarian relief will still move forward with or without the Port of Olympia.

Elizabeth (E.J.) Zita:

I grew up in a military family and married a US Army officer; when she served in Operation Iraqi Freedom, I would have welcomed her home through any port. I support our troops, and I support public safety and freedom of speech.

Our listening sessions prevented clashes over military cargo last year - in contrast to 2007-08. Local veterans facilitated respectful conversations between people with diverse views – and the Port of Olympia had no military cargo or protests.

Port management says JBLM is unlikely to choose Olympia for future military cargo. While Olympia is an alternate strategic port for JBLM, it is logistically difficult – because ships must travel to the end of Puget Sound, materials must travel through downtown, and some veterans and civilians object to military shipments - especially for illegal wars.

The port should inform the public about cargo safety issues, and facilitate peaceful freedom of speech, as Commissioner Downing suggested. I proposed that “safe cargo should not endanger people, air, or water, at a minimum.” Fellow commissioners prefer a minimum standard of “safe, legal cargo, for which the Port has adequate infrastructure.”

It is not clear that military cargo is safe cargo in Olympia. Can port infrastructure ensure public safety, for workers, residents, and law enforcement? If military cargo is not safe, and without suitable infrastructure, then it doesn't meet port criteria for acceptable cargo.